April 3, 2024

TO:   Sang-Hee Lee, Chair
      Riverside Division of the Academic Senate

FROM:  Wesley Leonard, Chair
        CHASS Executive Committee

RE:   Final report of the University of California Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities

The CHASS Executive Committee reviewed the Final report of the University of California Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities. This report provides staggering numbers – not just in the increase in the number of students seeking disability services (190% in the last four years), but also in the student-to-disability specialist ratio (468-to-1 at UCR).

It strikes the committee that the recommendation regarding student services (“Develop student services strategic plans…” on page 5) is the most important and should be the highest prioritized, though it is middling on the list of recommendations for university leaders. With the limited resources available to the campus, we suggest the campus should emphasize such service-oriented priorities rather than compliance-oriented staff (as proposed in the third recommendation, “Expand the functions of ADA coordinators…” also on page 5). As a related matter, we note the recommendations call for “chief accessibility officers” at each campus. The committee recognizes that such officers could play an important leadership/visionary role but feels that what students need most are entry-level staff who can support their accommodations.

A related concern regarding recommendations for university leaders is that there was no mention of the resources needed to provide services beyond disability specialists and initial accommodations meetings; these are important, foundational services. We should also remember that our students need support for those accommodations to be made. For example, we have observed inconsistency at UCR in the availability and quality of the services required for accommodations, especially in ASL interpreters.

There are multiple mentions recommending faculty to review Academic Senate regulations for incomplete grades without explicit discussion of how this may inequitably affect students with
disabilities (see page 6 and page 20). Something as simple as a sentence that begins with “For example, ...” would help faculty contextualize this recommendation and understand how to take effective action.

There are multiple mentions of existing resources for faculty (see pages 13 and 20), but how knowledgeable are faculty about these resources? What is the quality and uptake of these faculty resources? How can we ensure high-quality and across-the-board uptake? Are these resources available and of equal quality across all campuses? One member of the CHASS Executive Committee who has been at UCR since Fall 2018, and regularly engages the Student Disability Resource Center through the course of their work, had never heard of RIDLE 4X before reading this report (see page 20). They did a web search to find out that it isn’t directly about success for students with disabilities but instead promotes using Design Thinking in the classroom (a topic on which they published a peer-reviewed article). While Design Thinking can lead us to more inclusive classrooms (i.e., through adopting universal design), it’s not explicit how RIDLE 4X helps faculty to support the success of students with disabilities. Returning to the questions above, what was the uptake of this program like? In a period of belt-tightening, the committee recommends prioritizing spending on student services.

Finally, a small note: Figure 5 on page 18 needs a color key.